
TURNING AROUND LOW-PERFORMING SCHOOLS

Local Priority

The District of Columbia government has made a strong, visible commitment to ensure that children are ready for school and have the resources to succeed academically – with the goal that every neighborhood will have the capacity to meet this challenge. The citywide strategic plan outlines elements of this vision with a comprehensive plan for “Strengthening Children, Youth and Families.” This vision recognizes that schools in which children face many of the disadvantages of poverty require a range of community-based interventions that extend beyond delivery of educational services. Intensive, targeted interventions that have made a difference in schools have been organized around this principle. The initiators of a number of collaborative reform projects that include parents and the community in education reform have tended to view a school and its surrounding neighborhood as “part of an interdependent social ecology that must be understood as a whole in order to identify problems and develop solutions.”¹ A case study of one such school as a partner in its District of Columbia neighborhood will be featured later in this chapter.

While high poverty is not a precondition for failure, it does bring with it tremendous challenges to academic achievement that have to be addressed in a targeted way. Data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress show that the academic performance of students in the nation’s high-poverty schools is often several grade levels behind that of students in low-poverty schools. With 75 percent of students receiving free and reduced price lunch and more than 50 percent of families receiving cash assistance in all of Wards 6, 7, and 8, some tracts in Wards 1, 2, and 5, and a few tracts in Ward 4,² the District has a high density of schools in need of additional supports.

There are a number of programs in place to support children in these neighborhoods, many of whom attend the lowest-performing schools. The “Safe Passages” plan, under the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Children, Youth and Families, has initiated a whole-village approach to supporting children and youth. In addition, DCPS launched efforts to address the lowest-performing schools in 1996, calling them “targeted assistance” schools. This chapter proposes broadening the effort where these initiatives may fall short – by ***building capacity*** at the local school level. There is an array of proven interventions that have been used to help turn around low-performing schools, and these should be considered by the Board of Education and the Superintendent. This chapter suggests a focus on ***strengthening the capacities and leadership of school educators***. These are areas where generating political and community will can make a tremendous difference.

¹ “Parent Engagement as a School Reform Strategy,” ERIC/CUE Digest # 135. May 1995.

² 1990 United States Census Data.

The Williams administration has prioritized the success of low-performing schools based on the fundamental belief that all children can learn when given the right combination of resources and support. The Mayor advocates making this issue the District's number one priority in education for several key reasons:

- Capacity-building models that succeed in turning around the lowest-performing schools will provide key lessons for all schools.
- Despite limited resources, this initiative will target funds toward a clear objective, with clear accountability and outcomes.
- The District must seek a partnership with the federal government, but develop *its own proposals* for the most troubled schools.
- The initiative addresses the core causes of some of the challenges urban schools face, rather than the symptoms, building schools of the 21st century.
- The costs of NOT addressing the lowest-performing schools are significant, including increased costs for remediation and programs to address truancy and dropouts in the short term and the possibility of far more unemployed and incarcerated young people in the long term.

This initiative focuses solely on DCPS because the schools targeted will be those which have not performed over a period of at least three years and likely longer. Charter schools have not been in existence long enough to warrant this focus; in addition, chartering authorities are required to revoke charters for repeated non-performance. Therefore, low-performing charter schools should, if they continue to perform below established performance standards, lose their charters.

Over the past four years, DCPS has sought to improve the performance of its low-performing schools through its Targeted Assisted Schools Program. According to the program evaluators, since the program's inception, 80 percent of the 52 schools, or 41, have shown some improvement, with 50 percent, or 26, showing sufficient improvement to warrant graduation from the program.

Some 20 percent, or about ten, of the participating schools continue to require a high level of sustained intervention. These are the chronically underperforming schools at which the efforts proposed in this chapter should be first targeted.

Education cannot be a priority simply for some children; it must be a priority for all. The children in the lowest-performing schools are more likely not to be versed in the skills and competencies needed to function in a 21st century economy and, without adequate supports, are more likely to drop out without sufficient preparation for future employment or higher education. The costs of not addressing this problem are steep. The failure of local schools places the next generation of young people at risk.

National Imperative

Over the past decade, with an increased focus on standards and more precise measures of accountability for performance, policymakers at the state, federal, and local levels have turned to identifying and addressing the particular challenges facing low-performing schools. These schools are largely located in high-poverty, urban or very rural areas.

The Department of Education defines a low-performing school as any Title I school that has not made continuous and sustained academic progress over two years. (Title I of the Elementary and

Secondary Education Act is the largest source of federal financial assistance to the nation's schools. It is intended to address urban and rural schools with high poverty density. Some 95 percent of all schools in the country with poverty rates over 75 percent currently participate in the program, and about three-quarters of all Title I funds go to schools with poverty rates in excess of 50 percent.³)

Confronting the particular challenges facing low-performing schools in high-poverty neighborhoods is a top priority for the Bush administration.

The Department of Education's "Leave No Child Behind" proposal makes several specific recommendations for low-performing schools. These include:

- Setting high academic standards with measures to identify the level of school performance;
- Helping states with technical assistance funds turn around low-performing schools;
- Providing corrective actions for low-performing schools and districts after one academic year;
- Sanctioning states that fail to meet performance objectives. (After three years, if these actions have not yielded progress, parents can transfer the Title I funds per child to a private institution. As such, this is considered by many policymakers a voucher plan; and
- Rewarding schools that narrow the achievement gap.

A May 2000 Executive Order (13153), "Actions to Improve Low-Performing Schools," charged the Department of Education with improving low-performing schools' use of and access to resources, particularly federal resources, including Title I and others. One of the greatest distinctions of the current proposal is its incorporation of "vouchers" in the form of tax-credits for families and the possible loosening of Title I standards to allow parents to take those funds to private institutions. This element of the proposal has been a source of debate in national, state, and local seats of government.

A Local Case Study

Birney Elementary School is located in Southeast Washington, DC. More than 50 percent of the families in the area receive cash assistance and over 20 percent of youth between 16 and 19 years are unemployed.⁴ Almost all (98 percent) of its students in grades Pre-K – 6 are eligible for free or reduced-price student lunch. Nearly ten percent of its students are eligible for special education services. Despite these odds, Birney is a story of success.

Birney's principal, Yvonne Morse, who recently received recognition from the National Association of Elementary School Educators as Principal of the Year, has been working at turning her school around for nine years. Her school, identified as a targeted assisted school four years ago, has since demonstrated performance gains.

When she arrived at Birney, Ms. Morse found a school in chaos. Student achievement was exceptionally low; class sizes were huge – with as many as 37 students assigned to one teacher. A large number of students required assessment for special education services. Morale among the teachers was low, with many teachers on the payroll but not in the classroom due to their designation as "special subject" teachers. Strife between teachers, and between teachers and

³ "Reform and Results: An Analysis of Title I in the Great City Schools," Council of Great City Schools, March 1998.

⁴ "Youth Activities in the District of Columbia," Urban Institute Capacity and Needs Assessment, 1999.

administrators, was the norm, and there was very little interaction among school personnel, parents, and the community. The building was dilapidated and Ms. Morse could not discern how the budget was being spent.

Instability in students' home lives was mirrored and amplified in a community characterized by high levels of violence, economic disadvantage, and transience. More than half of the children scored below basic on assessments of reading.

To turn the school around, Morse focused on four areas:

- Improving parent and community involvement;
- Creating a stable and nurturing learning environment;
- Supporting quality teachers and teaching; and
- Targeting resources toward enhancing learning.

Improving Parent and Community Involvement

Shocked by the lack of community and parent involvement in the school, Morse began walking the neighborhood around the school on evenings and weekends, meeting parents and neighborhood merchants and inviting them to become involved in the school. She scheduled PTA meetings at times when parents could attend.

Morse succeeded in increasing parental involvement in school activities and parent conferences by outreach and frequent, regular communication, parent training opportunities, and other incentives for participation. Birney holds Saturday parent institutes that offer self-help classes, computer skills building, and help for parents learning to work with children on assignments. Birney also won the school district's award for bringing the most parents back to school, regularly clocking the highest attendance rate at parent-teacher conferences. The parents of more than two-thirds of Birney's children attend conferences. Her initiative and the school's success have inspired competition among staff to build relationships with parents, including participating in regular community walks in which they invite parents and others to the school.

Creating a Stable and Nurturing Learning Environment

Recognizing the lack of structure in her students' lives, Morse implemented a Core Values reform initiative that infused 13 core values throughout the school, involving children, the curriculum, parents, and the community. Children are taught to practice respect for themselves and others; and there is order and discipline at the school as a result. Students take pride in their school.

Morse also addressed the nexus of poverty and learning by making resources available to children and their families through staff and partners to ensure those basic needs – such as eyeglasses, clothing, and food – could be met for those who faced challenges in those areas. Birney used funds the school earned as a result of meeting its targets to establish a fund to pay for basic needs and also to cover instructional aides that would support individual students' learning. Morse also instituted a uniform dress code and secured resources to assist families that could not afford to purchase uniforms.

Morse built up substantial partnerships to provide students with the supports and educational enhancements they need. Birney now has a reservoir of university-based tutors and her school houses eight intervention programs staffed by volunteers. Every child has a mentor who knows student's precise needs.

Supporting Quality Teachers and Teaching

In order to lower student-teacher ratios in the classroom, Morse dramatically reduced special subject teachers at her school. She challenged her reading teachers to improve students' reading skills and, when they did not, removed them. She also removed teacher's aides without high school diplomas. While she would like to have more special subject teachers at the school, Morse believes that small class sizes, which provide intensive learning opportunities, must be a priority.

In addition, she sought to ameliorate the absence of adult males in the lives of her children by increasing the number of male teachers at her school.

Morse also provides ongoing professional development targeted to staff and student needs and rewards teachers for success: those whose students achieve the highest test scores receive \$500 to buy supplies for their classrooms.

Targeting Resources to Enhancing Learning

Four years ago, when the District instituted its Targeted Assisted Schools program, Birney became eligible for the adoption of a comprehensive school reform model. Morse selected the Success for All model (SFA), which focuses on restructuring schools, especially those serving students placed at risk, to ensure that every student learns how to read. Morse believes deeply that strong reading skills are the foundation for other learning and chose improving reading skills as the first point of attack. SFA provided not only a structured approach to reading from which all students could benefit, but also taught Birney's many young and inexperienced teachers to teach reading. Like many other high-poverty schools across the country, Birney is caught in a cycle where young and inexperienced teachers receive their first placements and, because of the challenging environment, frequently have short tenures. This is one of the key challenges to the school's stability Morse has identified and their lack of skill in teaching reading is one of the characteristics SFA helps to mitigate. Birney was so successful in implementing SFA that it was later highlighted as an SFA demonstration school.

When the Targeted Assisted Program began at Birney, 46 percent of all children scored below basic on reading. By end of 2000, only 24 percent were below basic and there was a significant jump in the number of students who tested as proficient. In 1997, 65 percent tested below basic in math; by 1999, only 23 percent were below and Birney had met all of its targets. While she is proud of her students' progress, Morse still recognizes that her school faces huge challenges and that she must continue to raise the bar. In fall 2000, Birney lost four teachers, which increased the average class size and meant that new teachers unversed in SFA's technique would need to be trained. The year 2000 test scores reflect the instability. In math, no students tested at the advanced level, and only three percent tested as proficient that year. In reading, Birney also saw a drop in 2000, which could be attributed to instability and inexperience among her teaching staff. Certainly, school reform models such as SFA are not educational cure-alls. Some believe they can stifle creativity in teaching. However, Morse points out that when the academic challenges are as deep and fundamental as those her students face, she is willing to subordinate creativity to mastery of the basics.

Extracting the Lessons

Morse demonstrates that leadership that improves parent and community involvement, creates a stable and nurturing learning environment, supports quality teachers and teaching, and targets resources toward enhancing learning can turn around a low-performing school. That leadership is the clear and consistent element underlying Birney's success. The principal exemplifies the leadership, vision, commitment and stamina that must be at the core of any effort to turn around schools that face seemingly insurmountable odds in their quest for success.

These lessons are borne out by national research and experience. Two studies describe these common lessons.

First, the Pew Forum on Education Reform cites the following as core components for successful turnarounds:

- Smart, strong leadership;
- A mission clearly and intently focused on children's learning;
- Highly competent and committed teachers;
- Clean lines of responsibility;
- Adequate financial resources; and
- An environment that fosters collaboration, trust and continuous learning.

Second, in December 1999, the Department of Education released "Hope for Urban Education: A Study of Nine High-Performing, High-Poverty, Urban Elementary Schools." The study profiled nine schools with different populations, histories, and means of achieving high standards. The researchers found, however, that, despite their differences, there were many similarities in the strategies schools used to improve student achievement.

The common denominator among all of these studies and experiences is leadership. The principal's leadership generates the leadership of parents, teachers, and students, while maintaining rigorous and high standards, and without avoiding difficult choices. Principals challenge school staff and celebrate their successes. They align standards and assessments with instruction and give teachers the resources they need to teach. They also find creative methods to maximize Title I and other federal funds.

A District of Columbia Proposal

Based on these and other national and local studies, this chapter advocates that policymakers adopt the following three principles to *build the long-term capacity* of low-performing schools in the District of Columbia:

- Partner with successful local interventions and replicate best practices nationwide;
- Recruit and retain outstanding principals, who engage parents and the community and enroll external partners; and
- Create a foundation based on caring, qualified, committed teachers.

As a result of prior failed efforts, the community may view new attempts to bring about dramatic change with skepticism. This chapter is intended to promote the need for intensifying efforts to turn around low-performing schools, but not to define the precise remedy. The means to achieve this important end must be accepted by a range of stakeholders, including the Mayor, the Superintendent, the Board of Education, and the City Council, as well as an array of community groups. Given the District's limited assets to augment baseline budgets in FY2002, various sources of funding should be explored by these parties in efforts to support these programs.

Partner with successful interventions and replicate best practices.

"Low Performing" schools in the District of Columbia are called "targeted assistance schools" at present. (See Appendix A for more detailed information.) Currently, there are 52 targeted assistance (TA) schools as identified by low student achievement levels on standardized assessment measures. These schools have been targeted for additional support to enhance the quality of instruction and to improve learning outcomes for their respective student populations.

Support efforts for TA schools revolve primarily around the adoption of a particular comprehensive school reform model that is designed to strengthen academic performance and that is selected by the schools to meet the needs of their particular student populations. The reform models adopted by TA schools may be selected from any one of several comprehensive programs that have empirically demonstrated success with other low-achieving student populations.

The use of reform models is reflected in each TA school's budget. The cost of each model averages \$50,000 for the adoption of the school reform model. With associated interventions such as change facilitators and other supports, TA schools receive an average of \$75,000 to \$150,000. Seventy-five percent of those funds are provided by federal monies, with the remaining 25 percent added locally.

New York City recently initiated a budget-neutral model that the District could emulate as it looks for proven models to turn around low-performing schools. New York City has undertaken a new citywide approach to engage private partners in reform. The Chancellor and the Board of Education identified 100 schools that they determined to be under-performing. These schools, referred to by the state as "Schools Under Restrictive Review," have posted chronically poor test scores in reading and math. New York's approach was to engage the assistance of the private sector.

In July 2000, the Chancellor solicited bids to contract out a small number of these schools. In December, Edison Schools, the nation's largest educational management organization, was selected to run five schools that were to be converted to charter schools. (Under New York law, only charter schools may contract with an outside partner to run their school.) The initiative is now awaiting a vote by parents, who must choose to convert to a charter by a vote of at least 51 percent.

As noted earlier, communities have often been skeptical of efforts to partner with for-profit school companies. These efforts are not silver bullets. Nonetheless, the promise that these partnerships introduce sound models requires further discussion with stakeholders, as is now taking place in New York City. One key difference from several years ago is that several of the for-profit companies now boast track records of success, where many others have had dismal failures. Here in the District, the Edison-Friendship public charter schools have shown marked performance gains over the past three years and continue on an upward trajectory.

A brief description of the Chamberlain Campus, one of the Edison Friendship public charter schools in the District, illustrates some of the potential benefits of partnering with a national model. Chamberlain, located in Ward 6 in Southeast, is the largest elementary (K-5) school in the District of Columbia, with 900 students. Chamberlain has shown significant and consistent performance gains in the SAT-9 test over the past two years, well exceeding Edison's national average of six percentile points, and more than most DC public schools and all other charter schools. In 1999, 69 percent of students scored at basic or above in reading, and 65 percent scored at basic or above on math. In spring 2000, these scores improved: 74 percent of students scored at basic or above in reading, and 73 percent scored at basic or above in math.

One hallmark of the Edison design allows for students to stay in smaller learning communities with the same teacher over a period of years, thereby establishing strong student-student and student-teacher relationships. In this design, students are placed in "schools within schools." The school is split into three academies and then, into smaller multi-grade houses of 100-180 students with four to six teachers. It is also worth noting two other features of this school model. First, Chamberlain has a longer school day, with children in class for eight hours each day, for 198 days of the year. (The national norm is 180 days, with six hours of class time each day.) Second, the school uses the Success for All reading model, a structured approach which Birney Elementary and many other schools have chosen to adopt.

The community's response shows great interest in Chamberlain's accomplishments. There are currently 900 students on a waiting list to attend. (Students are granted admission through a blind lottery system.)

Like the principal at Birney Elementary, Principal John Pannell demonstrates the power of an experienced, effective school leader. He echoes some of the sentiments of Birney Elementary's principal, citing the need for a stable and nurturing environment with strong teachers and adequate resources for learning. Dr. Pannell also believes that he has been successful in creating such an environment because his role as a charter school principal with the backing of a national network, provides him important freedoms as the school leader. These include:

- The opportunity to focus on being an educational leader, with management concerns effectively handled through his partnership with Edison Schools and Friendship House;
- A level of budget and decision-making autonomy that he did not experience in his prior posts; and
- Clear rewards for schools and individual performance.

Some of the following are benefits that national models like Edison Schools could bring to more District schools:

- Strong national recruitment for principals and teachers;
- State-of-the-art technology;
- Investment in well-rounded education (e.g. language, physical education, arts);
- Longer hours in school and links to community agencies to make schools providers of health care and other services;
- Track record of bold change and test performance gains, with a focus on changing school culture for lasting impact; and

- Extensive investment in books and materials.

Recommendations

1. District leadership and stakeholders should develop a plan to turn around low performing schools, with interventions to begin as early as fall 2001. Leadership should consider issuing a request for proposals (RFP) for half of the lowest performing public schools, identified as the lowest ten percent on the targeted assistance list. Five would, thereby, be identified in the first year. These schools could remain within the public school system, subject to Board of Education standards and performance outcomes. The RFP would be budget-neutral. Other interventions could require additional expenditures.
2. Policymakers should identify options for special reductions in class, or even school, size, for high-poverty/low-performing schools. The budget implications of this effort would depend on how many schools are covered and by what incentives.
3. City leadership should work to identify \$1.75 million to support the Board of Education's proposal to renew low-performing DCPS high schools. This program will identify schools based on test performance, dropout rates, and other characteristics of low-performing schools. The plan focuses on teacher training and support and the role of excellent administrators.

Recruit and retain outstanding principals, who engage parents and the community and enroll external partners

The Leadership in Educational Administration Development (LEAD) Principals program will use salary and other incentives to recruit and retain promising candidates for as many as 30 of the lowest-performing DCPS schools. Clearly, both local case studies, Birney and Chamberlain, feature principals who are demonstrating success locally. In addition, under this program, these school leaders could also be recruited from elsewhere. This program will provide additional training and offer increased compensation for performance. The DCPS Department of Educational Accountability is creating a Responsibility Index with an associated salary scale. This tool will be used to provide increased compensation for principals who serve at the most challenging schools. This program also encourages non-traditional educators, such as professionals from other fields with less extensive education background, to apply. The business community has pledged to be a partner in this effort by supporting national recruitment.

Recommendations

1. The FY2002 budget includes \$750,000 to support the LEAD Principals program. These funds will be used to provide salary incentives of up to \$23,000 per person for 30 individuals, professional development, and other materials.
2. DCPS should determine a source of ongoing funding to keep salaries competitive across the region. (One year of funding only supports the cohort's salary incentive as a bonus, not an ongoing raise.) In the short term, this primarily requires staff time.
3. DCPS and others should examine current principal evaluation methodology and contractual language and make changes as needed to recruit and retain extraordinary leaders from a range of backgrounds.

Create a foundation based on caring, qualified, committed teachers

Leadership and learning must be supported by a strong and able force of teachers. Efforts to retain extraordinary principals go hand in hand with recruiting and retaining the highest quality teachers.

Incentives should consider both the professional and financial needs of prospective job candidates. National research shows that educators more often leave the classroom because the environment is not conducive to professionalism and growth, than due to receiving low salaries. Both front-end and ongoing incentives must be considered to build capacity throughout the system.

One needed approach is to strengthen teacher recruitment. The New Teacher Project is working with DCPS to create an aggressive teacher recruitment strategy that will attract strong mid-career professionals to the teaching profession. The DC Teaching Fellows program seeks to place 100 new teachers in fall 2001. The model has been adopted in New York City and Philadelphia, among other urban jurisdictions, and in the state of Massachusetts. The project actively recruits and competitively selects high-quality candidates and provides them with intensive, specialized training before they enter the classroom.

A second approach is to entice new teachers with housing and financial incentives to live in the District. Currently, the District of Columbia Public Schools (unless other funding source is indicated below) offers:

- \$1,000 signing bonus for regular education teachers;
- \$2,000 signing bonus for special education teachers;
- \$3,000 signing bonus for dual certification in special education and high school;
- \$250 voucher for school supplies;
- Up to \$500 reimbursement for moving expenses;
- HUD Teacher Next Door Program with zero money down on new home (federal);
- Bank of America New Mortgage program for teachers (private); and
- Perkins student loan cancellation for those who serve low-income students (federal).

A third approach that has been adopted by many urban school systems is to provide bonuses to teachers who choose to teach in turnaround schools.

Finally, professional development efforts must also be an integral part of any proposal to retain teachers. The DC-based, Supports for Quality Teaching Task Force proposes a thoughtful and comprehensive strategy for induction, professional development, leadership education and the maintenance of quality teaching conditions. The recommendations of this group, which includes a range of institutional and community stakeholders, could serve as a blueprint for the more intensive efforts to help low-performing schools meet their targets.

Recommendations

1. The FY2002 budget includes \$1.2 million to fund the DC Teaching Fellows Program, with the \$500,000 contractor's fee to be assumed by DCPS or funded with other support. The program should be evaluated as a pilot for future efforts and, possibly, more systemic changes in the way recruitment is conducted.

2. DCPS and the District government should continue to support housing and financial incentives to enable teachers to live in the District of Columbia and explore new tax and other incentives, including property and income tax reductions.
3. DCPS and the School Board should develop a scale to identify levels of additional salary incentives for teachers in exchange for a three-year commitment to low-performing schools.
4. City leaders should work to identify support for FY2002 to support an initiative for National Board Certification. This program provides teachers the support to obtain this prestigious national certification that improves their teaching skills and provides a new level of professional rigor and growth opportunity. These teachers should be encouraged and provided incentives to teach in low-performing schools.

Conclusion

There are those who would argue that the District has tried to have an impact on low-performing schools and failed. However, in the past, multiple changes in the administration of DCPS may have prevented full implementation, evaluation and replication of sound models. The rapid turnover of leadership at DCPS may have also prevented comprehensive efforts from being institutionalized. Budget cuts may have also had a negative impact on nascent efforts. The resulting succession of programs of varying duration with little consistent support or evaluation of impact has not proven a powerful, comprehensive effort.

To reach the students in these schools will require resources, political will, and staying power. The District of Columbia has the pieces in place to secure lasting reform – an able School Board, an engaged Mayor, a seasoned Superintendent, a committed City Council, and an invested community. There is no excuse for not taking a long-term approach, catalyzed by bold short-term action, that will build capacity through school leadership and a 21st century teaching force.

APPENDIX A: Additional Background on the Targeted Assistance Program

Two sets of selection criteria were used to identify public schools in the District of Columbia that are eligible for targeted assistance. During the first year of this reform initiative, 1996 to 1997, 23 schools were identified based on the following three-level approach to defining academic eligibility:

Level I. Schools that demonstrated poor student performance results over a three-year period and were in a continuing pattern of decline

These schools were selected to receive intensive support from the Lab for Student Success (LSS) at Temple University as a means of improving learning outcomes. A full-time “change facilitator” was assigned to each Level I school to augment assistance provided by the LSS. Principals and change facilitators attended training sessions at Temple University and visited Philadelphia area schools that used the LSS approach. Essentially, training activities offered by the LSS were designed to enhance instruction, classroom management, and professional preparation for staff in the selected schools. The schools identified for Level I during SY1996-1997 were Davis, Shadd, Simon, Turner, and Walker-Jones elementary schools.

Level II. Schools that displayed a pattern of low academic performance over a three-year period, but were showing some recent improvement

Improvements were judged as uneven and these schools were believed to be at risk of lower academic performance in the absence of a well-defined reform model. Targeted assistance for the Level II schools involved the placement of a full-time “change facilitator” in each building. The focus of the assistance to these schools centered on building literacy skills in the students

Staff development and technical assistance were provided for data analysis, reading instruction and implementation of a literacy program. Also, Level II schools were provided funding for selecting and implementing a whole-school reform model as a means for improving learning outcomes in their respective student populations. Five schools were identified for Level II support – Birney, Drew, Garrison, Miner, and Stanton elementary schools.

Level III. Schools that displayed a pattern of low academic performance over a three-year period, but demonstrated clear evidence of academic improvement in their student populations

Level III schools were provided full-time “change facilitators” and was given funding support to implement whole-school reform models. Thirteen schools were identified for targeted assistance in SY1996-1997 based on the Level III criteria. These schools were Bowen, Clark, P.R. Harris, Hendley, Keene, LaSalle, Nalle, Noyes, M.C. Terrell, Van Ness, Webb, J.O. Wilson, and Woodridge elementary schools.

A different criterion was used to select schools for targeted assistance during the second year of this reform initiative SY1997-1998. Schools selected in this school year were identified on the basis of transformed mean scores for each school. Mean normal curve equivalency scores (NCEs) were generated for each public school in the District to determine eligibility for the reform initiative. Briefly, NCEs are transformed raw assessment scores that reflect student academic performance according to national norms. For instance, a score of 54.7 suggests that a student, or group of students, performed equal to or better than 54.7 percent of all students nationally. Thus, higher NCE scores represent stronger academic performance as assessed by a standardized instrument.

The Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills was used to assess student performance during SY1995-1996, and the SAT9 was the standardized instrument used during subsequent years of the reform initiative.

The DCPS administration decided that schools with mean NCEs equal to or lower than 44.1, would be eligible for targeted assistance. These mean scores were generated from SAT9 performance outcomes for the 1997 spring assessment period, yet the identification process was completed in March 1998. Schools at all grade levels were identified and selected for targeted assistance during the second year of the initiative. That is, middle schools, junior high and senior high schools were selected during the second year to augment the elementary focus of the first year. Elementary schools were selected in 1998, but the focus was broadened to include all grade levels. A total of 29 schools were selected for targeted assistance during the second year. There were 12 elementary schools selected based on the NCE criterion.⁵ These included Bruce-Monroe (39.3), Fletcher Johnson (32.1), Kenilworth (36.1), Ketcham (34.7), Malcolm X (29.6), McGogney (36.9), Plummer (33.5), Powell (38.1), Thomas (36.5), Tyler (31.4), Wilkinson (33.8) and Winston (33.5).

Five middle schools were identified for targeted assistance in 1998, including Evans (30.9), Garnet-Patterson (33.3), Kramer (30.5), Lincoln (29.7) and MacFarland (33.2). Three junior high schools were selected for targeted assistance during the second year – Browne (34.5), Johnson (28.8), and R.H. Terrell (31.0). Finally, a total of ten senior high schools were selected for targeted assistance, including Anacostia (32.0), Ballou (30.9), Bell Multicultural (31.5), Cardozo (30.8), Dunbar (38.3), Eastern (36.9), M.M. Washington (31.5), Phelps (29.8), Roosevelt (31.2) and Woodson (34.6).

APPENDIX B: Further Information on the Teaching Fellows Program

The Teaching Fellows Program has a track record of success recruiting talented new teachers. The Massachusetts program placed 58 individuals in fall 1999. Eligibility requirements set a high standard. The Commissioner of Education required participants to:

- Score in the 90th percentile on nationally recognized standardized test;
- Be in the top tenth percentile of graduating class;
- Have a 3.5 GPA in their major;
- Have a 3.5 GPA overall; or
- Be nominated by the Dean of their college.

The recruitment campaign yielded 800 applicants who met the criteria above. Of those, 123 finalists were selected and 58 were chosen. The group is more diverse and higher in completed education than the average teaching cadre:

- 45 percent male;
- 20 percent minority (Forty-three percent didn't report ethnicity);
- 49 percent mid-career;
- 21 percent from an Ivy League College or University for undergraduates;
- 50 with a Masters degree or PhD; and
- Eight percent with a law degree.

⁵Note that mean NCEs for each school are enclosed the parentheses.